Millennial *Jihad* in the Digital Age

Critical Discourse Analysis of Self-Radicalization and Self-Recruitment among the Millenial Generation

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Abstract

   This investigation delves into the profound impact of technology and social media by examining *jihad* narratives within the millennial demographic. The millennial generation, employing an innovative strategy of self-directed learning, has moulded propositions, paradigms, dual meanings, and religious narratives, resulting in the emergence of two pivotal terms: self-radicalization and self-recruits. Utilising Teun A Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, we scrutinise a news item, unraveling discourses and multiple meanings. Our findings intricately expound upon the contextualisation of millennials, technology, the Internet, social media, YouTube, radicalism, *jihad*, and religious narratives—a trilogy that introduces a groundbreaking terminology: Critical discourse analysis of self-religious narratives, with a specific focus on self-radicalization and self-recruitment. This study propels our comprehension of how millennials navigate and influence religious discourses in the era of digital communication.

Keywords: *jihad*, discourse, millennial, self-radicalization, self-recruitment

Introduction

Technological advancements have given rise to a new social landscape, signifying the emergence of a generation rooted in internet technology – the millennial generation, born between the 1980s and 2000s. Currently aged 17-37, this demographic is closely associated with technology and social media (Bastian, Arizal, et al., 2021). Despite being framed as a generation equipped with digital literacy, a notable gap exists in their utilisation and interpretation of technology, leading to discussions around radicalism. As internet users, millennials often struggle to discern information and may compromise ethical considerations in communication.

Further scrutiny reveals that the digital literacy skills of Indonesian millennials are categorically low, posing a potential threat (Syahputra in Bastian, Arizal, et al., 2021). The Millennial generation, acknowledged for their intelligence and digital literacy, nonetheless exhibits a deficiency in effectively applying and understanding implemented technology. Many of these young individuals in social media circles lack a mature religious understanding. They follow preachings that contribute to radical perspectives. Compounding this, the phenomenon of the 'click generation,' characterised by a lack of media literacy, leads to the dissemination of news, information, and content that divides nations without verifying the truth, particularly on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

Digging deeper, recent times have witnessed a pervasive rise in radicalism globally, including Indonesia. Discussions about radicalism often conflate it with terrorism, identifying it as a form of violence with detrimental consequences (Zamzamy, 2019). Radicalism is perceived as an attitude or position seeking to replace the existing status quo with something entirely different. The methods employed are often revolutionary, involving a drastic overturning of established values through violence and extreme actions (Juergensmeyer, 2002 in Zamzamy).

Doctrines that fuel radicalism among young people, particularly in the millennial generation, contribute to the emergence of new constructs that gradually evolve into dogmas. These doctrines permeate the paradigm or thought processes of the youth, portraying radicalism as a representation of their commitment to an absolute "truth." Implicit beliefs form, linking radicalism to the pursuit of *jihad*.

This analysis indicates that *jihad* itself can be subject to misinterpretation influenced by symbols associated with certain Islamic groups. The emergence of doctrines shaping radical perspectives gradually transforms into dogmas, with young individuals believing in the absolute truth of radicalism as part of the journey towards *jihad* (Maula, 2021).

The millennial generation's relationship with technology, digital literacy challenges, and susceptibility to radical doctrines highlight the complex interplay between technological developments, societal influences, and religious narratives. A nuanced understanding of these dynamics is crucial in addressing the multifaceted issues surrounding radicalism and its implications for the millennial demographic.

A comprehensive exploration elucidates that the concept of *jihad* may undergo mis-

interpretation when influenced by symbols accommodating specific Islamic groups. This influence can lead to forming an ideology seemingly legitimising and establishing a regime of truth or belief perceived as essential and valid by adherents (Maula, 2021). One noble teaching applicable to fostering quality education is the concept of *jihad*. Rooted in a theological spirit, *jihad* aims to attain the pleasure of God. Hence, it becomes crucial to revitalise *jihad* in a broad sense for every individual Muslim.

The meaning of *jihad* is subject to diverse interpretations among Muslim scholars. Broadly, it can be categorised into two perspectives: one construes it as limited to *'qital'* or *'harb'*, meaning war, a view held predominantly in the West. Conversely, a broader interpretation sees *jihad* as a form of struggle for a believer to attain God's pleasure, promoting and exalting God's religion. In this context, *jihad* can manifest in various fields, encompassing social, educational, economic, legal, political, and other realms (Wahyudi, 2021). Contrary to previous research (Wahyudi, 2021), the term *jihad* originates from "jahd," denoting effort, toil, and hardship, and is derived from "juhd," signifying ability or strength.

Implicitly, the analysis of *jihad*, rooted in divine spirit, encounters challenges when individuals interpret its meaning differently. Many religious narratives undergo deconstruction, with arguments based on individuals' subjective truths in the name of religion and divinity. According to Juergensmeyer (in Maula, 2021), the contextualisation of *jihad* involves wrapping Islamic terminology, perceived as crucial, to recruit new potential combatants. This assumes that presenting actions within a religious narrative makes them more convincing and respectable. However, religion, including *jihad*, can be manipulated to attribute value and meaning to various actions, including acts of terrorism.

The stimulation of religious narratives, an integral component of *jihad*, is closely tied to the deluge of information on social media. The massive amount of information on these platforms constructs a radical paradigm capable of leading individuals into radicalism. Furthermore, other motivating factors for joining a terrorist network include domestic issues like poverty, injustice, and disappointment with the government. International factors, such as global injustice, arrogant foreign policies, and modern imperialism of superpowers, also play a role. Additionally, cultural elements are linked to shallow religious understanding and narrow interpretations of scriptures (Aisy, Ibrahim, Intang, Tindage, 2019).

Building on this, the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has transformed the meaning of religious literacy, particularly with the ubiquity of the Internet. Radical Muslims or terrorists worldwide have utilised the Internet to build communication networks for disseminating information and propaganda (Brauchler in Kusuma & Azizah, 2018). Digital literacy, interpreted as the ability to understand, analyze, assess, organise, and evaluate information using digital technology, becomes crucial. As suggested by the evolving narrative, good digital literacy enables the millennial generation to filter information in the virtual world, safeguarding them from exposure to radical ideas (Pratiwi & Pritanova, 2017).

This article contributes to existing research by addressing an empirical gap that focuses solely on radicalism among the millennial generation, influenced mainly by technology,

without exploring how they engage in *jihad*. This study also delves into the transformation experienced by applying the Self-Directed Learning method. Consequently, the focus of empirical gap research is on the patterns of behaviour, thought processes, the latest approaches to *jihad*, and the ideological framework of the millennial generation, which epitomises their independence in learning, commonly referred to as Self-Directed Learning (Hanik, 2020). This has given rise to a new narrative and religious activity termed self-radicalization and self-recruitment. The objective analysis in this writing centres on the contextualisation and religious narratives of *jihad* that experience a narrative distraction amidst the rapid development of technology and the Internet in the millennial generation.

This study employs a qualitative research method, utilising the Critical Discourse Analysis approach by Teun A Van Djik. Van Dijk's model, grounded in an analysis of the text, scrutinises how a text is produced to derive insights into its meaning, considering the text as a result of a production practice (Eriyanto, 2009). Critical Discourse Analysis, as a research method, is typically employed to dissect and analyze news containing text comprising a discourse or discourse within the text. Van Djik's model, focusing on social cognition, elucidates that text formation occurs within a discourse or discourse practice, revealing the structure and process of creating a text that stimulates and represents multiple meanings.

Social Media & YouTube Channels as a New Stimulus for Millennial Jihadists in the Digital Age

A distinct relationship exists between religion and social media, each operating within its sphere and adhering to the evolving dynamics of human life. Harianto (2018) implicitly delineates the separation of religion and media, emphasising religion with the divine, holiness, and sacredness, while media, in all its forms, is an integral facet of human life—profane and distant from the concept of holiness. Nevertheless, a mutual dependency and interaction between the two exist despite this inherent distinction. Religion relies on media to disseminate its teachings, and conversely, media benefits from the content provided by religious narratives. This collaboration, though not always consistent, has the potential to influence society at large. However, the progression of media is purported to have eroded the praxis side of religious teachings, suggesting a departure from fundamental religious norms. The dominance of widely used social media platforms, particularly YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, exemplifies this influence, with data indicating substantial user access (Junawan & Nurdi, 2020).

Building upon the advancements in social media, this development is intricately connected to digital literacy. Digital literacy underscores the skills of digital media users in conducting productive mediation processes (Kurnia & Wijayanto, 2020; Kurnia & Astuti, 2017). Beyond mere operational proficiency, digital literacy encompasses digital culture, ethical considerations in digital media use, and ensuring its safe utilisation. While survey data for the National Digital Literacy Index in 2020 indicates increased Internet accessi-

bility across diverse regions, the overall digital literacy in Indonesian society is considered moderate, with varying sub-indexes reflecting different aspects of digital literacy (Kominfo, 2020).

The contextualisation of digital literacy skills among the millennial generation, utilising platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, in Indonesia, reveals a complex relationship with radicalism. As discussed earlier, social media can serve as a tool to propagate moderate values and tolerance, fostering messages of diversity and unity. However, on the flip side, these platforms can also become conduits for spreading radical and extremist ideologies. Radical groups leverage social media for disseminating extremist messages, networking, and recruiting members. The same platforms enable the spread of propaganda and damaging narratives that reinforce the perceptions and beliefs of radical groups. Instances exist where individuals involved in acts of terrorism in Indonesia were influenced by radical content on social media, exemplifying the dual nature of these platforms. A notable case involves a married couple, as reported by Kompas TV's YouTube Channel in 2021, where one partner, a university student, was exposed to radical teachings aligning with global terrorist groups' aspirations to become suicide bombers.

The evolution of the Internet, particularly through social media, serves as a new stimulus for specific groups within the millennial generation. This stimulus prompts the independent adoption of various understandings, teachings, and narratives related to *jihad*. Contrasting recruitment patterns before the Internet's dominance, contemporary methods rely on modernised and connected processes, making recruitment more efficient and effective. Engagement or close relationships are now formed solely through the Internet, as individuals connect based on shared symbols and profiles on platforms like Facebook, thereby fostering a sense of camaraderie around a radical spirit. Dictions such as "solitude in religion" serve as influential stimuli, propelled by the speed of the Internet, enabling like-minded individuals to connect and justify criminal activities under the guise of *jihad* and narratives advocating for truth and moderation in religion. This concept should not be moderated, but rather necessitates a moderated understanding.

Brainwashing Model Creates *Jihad* Narratives Without the Role of Radical Groups

Brainwashing, or the exertion of influence on the mind, is a psychological manipulation process designed to alter an individual's views, beliefs, and behaviour in alignment with specific goals. In the context of terrorism and radicalism, brainwashing is frequently employed to reshape an individual's thinking toward adopting a radical ideology. Conceptually, as posited by Saputra in Suhardin et al. (2021), the conceptual framework within the millennial brain is inundated with information that induces fear, panic, anxiety, and despair regarding global developments and the political, economic, and cultural landscape in post-reform Indonesia. Issues such as inequality, underdevelopment, ignorance, poverty, and powerlessness are opportunistically exploited to instill anxiety and panic about the

future, particularly within the realms of religion and divinity. Amid this turmoil, a grand project is offered, promising a more optimistic future and the resurgence of a glorious era for the new generation of Muslims.

Brainwashing techniques wield influence over individual thinking, promoting radical ideologies even when not directly associated with well-known terrorist or extremist groups. According to the bbc.indonesia.com website, these techniques may encompass: 1) Using narratives that glorify *jihad* and sacrifice to achieve desired goals; 2) Manipulating individual emotions by emphasising anger, injustice, and pain to render individuals more susceptible to radical ideology; 3) Manipulating or eliminating information contradictory to radical ideology to ensure individuals only receive information aligned with their views; 4) Rewarding or praising attitudes and actions that support radical ideology. In this context, the role of social media emerges as a crucial factor in disseminating *jihadist* narratives, facilitated by the ease with which radical content can be spread and popularised to a broad audience.

It is imperative to recognise that the systematic application of brainwashing by certain radical groups, leveraging social media and internet development, aims not only to inspire but also to exploit a void in religious narratives, unconsciously indoctrinating the millennial generation. This prompts conflicting critical thinking in young individuals who consciously immerse themselves in religious content as a new framing in their online searches. BNPT (National Agency for Combating Terrorism) data from 2020 reveals that the potential index for radicalism in urban communities reached 12.3%, and in rural communities, it reached 12.1%. Additionally, active seekers of religious content on the Internet exhibit a higher potential for radicalism (12.6%) than those who do not actively seek such content (10.8%).

Comprehensive analysis shows that netizens, primarily dominated by the younger generation or millennials, consciously indoctrinate themselves with radical ideologies without external stimuli from known radical groups. This self-induced stimulus within the Jihad narrative, utilising brainwashing methods, signifies a new transformation, introducing terms now familiar in the resistance to deracination in Indonesia—self-radicalization and self-recruitment.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Self-Radicalization among the Millennial Generation in the Digital Age

Delving comprehensively into the relevance of social media to radicalism, particularly in how it stimulates and inspires the Millennial generation to independently formulate, indoctrinate, and radicalise themselves without external influences, sparks an intriguing exploration into the realm of self-radicalization critical discourse analysis. A research study on self-radicalization conducted by McCauley (2015) and published by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization not only delves into the meaning and concept of

self-radicalization but also examines explicitly the methods employed by radical groups to influence individuals, such as online propaganda and da'wah campaigns on social media.

The religious narratives of the millennial generation in the digital era offer a profound understanding of how these narratives shape thoughts and actions toward radicalism. As highlighted earlier, the digital age significantly facilitates the Millennial generation's exposure to radical extremist beliefs, propositions, and ideologies, often veiled in religious narratives, to achieve the highest *jihad* through social media and the Internet. The dissemination of religious narratives permeating individual thinking triggers self-radicalization, entwined with social, economic, political, and religious contexts, alongside the absolute value of truth in the heavenly context.

Critical Discourse Analysis serves the function of dissecting the dual meanings present in a discourse or narrative. It is instrumental in identifying how prominent religious narratives on social media and the Internet influence perceptions of religion and to what extent these narratives either foster tolerance and harmony or propagate values that stimulate radicalism. Conversely, another narrative posits that self-radicalization results from indoctrination, establishing dogma that systematically suppresses conscience and critical thinking to carry out the highest *jihad*, including acts of terrorism.

A Critical Discourse Analysis of news from bbcindonesia.com titled "Makassar Bombing: 'Millennials' involved in suicide bombings and the lure of 'shortcuts to heaven,' how to anticipate?" underscores the age of the perpetrators, both belonging to the Millennial generation at the age of 25. This suggests a strong and massive absorption of radicalism, enabling them to engage in *jihad* at a remarkably young age with the ultimate goal of attaining sovereignty in heaven through acts of terror.

A noteworthy aspect of the critical study on the Millennial generation and its correlation with self-radicalization is their ability to radicalise themselves independently, relying on their soft skills, particularly critical thinking, to explore and refine their understanding of implementing violent values and ideologies. As reported by bbcindonesia.com, data from the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) reveals that from 2002 to 2020, 11.4% of the 825 former terrorist convicts, over 90 individuals, were reinvolved in terrorism after leaving prison. The recruitment of terrorists through the Internet, coupled with the shortcomings in the de-radicalization programs for former terrorists, contributes to the infiltration of religious narratives into the Millennial generation, leading to independent self-radicalization and the emergence of a self-radicalization narrative.

Empirical data from BNPT (National Counter-Terrorism Agency) for 2021, as quoted from cnnindonesia.com, states that 85 percent of the Millennial generation is vulnerable to exposure to radicalism due to social media acting as a readily accessible incubator for radical ideologies. In this context, critical discourse analysis proves invaluable in identifying implicit meanings within religious narratives and understanding how these meanings shape perceptions of religion. The double meanings inherent in these narratives become consumable material for the Millennial generation during their radicalization process. Self-radicalization, or Mandiri, becomes a disinformation and misrepresentation, giving

rise to dualistic thought patterns that solidify into dogma within their paradigms. This complexity in critical thinking creates a space on the Internet and social media where these narratives are produced, generating new meanings within their schools of thought.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Self-Recruitment among the Millennial Generation in the Digital Age

The evolution of the Millennial generation, exposed to radicalism and self-indoctrination through the self-radicalization narrative, gives rise to the subsequent phenomenon of Self-Recruitment. Critical discourse analysis on self-recruitment within religious narratives implicitly examines the construction of oaths of allegiance for significant operations or noble acts believed to pave the way to heaven, as reported by Kompas TV's YouTube Channel in a segment titled "Millennials are Vulnerable to Radicalism and Terrorism," where experts discuss social media as a means of dissemination.

The self-recruitment narrative can potentially influence individuals in recruiting themselves into radical groups. The millennial generation's easy exposure to religious narratives through social media and the Internet allows them to engage with information, shaping their thoughts and actions selectively. The spread of religious narrative information that permeates individual thinking becomes a stimulus for triggering Self-Recruitment. Young people, motivated by exposure to self-radicalization and self-recruitment, become increasingly addicted to information with extremist and radical meanings within this virtual or digital world, creating a personalised space for exploration.

This analysis can delve into the strategies employed in religious narratives to recruit individuals into radical groups, encompassing emotional manipulation, information censorship conflicting with group views, and rewarding attitudes supporting the group. Critical Discourse Analysis of news by bbcindonesia.com titled "Shooting of Police Headquarters: 'Suspected terrorist with ISIS ideology', police reveal the identity of the 25-year-old woman who carried out the attack" reveals double meanings, especially regarding the suspected terrorist ZA aged 25. The discourse, framed by doctrines and dogmas obtained in the digital world, illustrates how ZA proclaimed himself to reach heaven by shooting at the police.

A highly motivating discourse for the Millennial generation, fostering self-empowerment with radical and extremist ideologies through self-radicalization and self-recruitment, is encapsulated in the term Vivere Pericoloso. Popularised by Benito Mussolini, the term signifies pleasure and a tendency towards something dangerous. This discourse plays a significant role in the psychology of Millennials, who are drawn to information about might, heroism, and adrenaline-inducing content, closely intertwining with narratives of radicalism. In this context, self-recruitment reflects a private and implicit process in the regeneration of terror, evident in the massive number of tech-savvy Millennials proficient in using technology, the Internet, and social media.

Conclusion

This text underscores the interconnected contextualisation among millennials, technology, the Internet, Social Media, YouTube, radicalism, *jihad*, and religious narratives, forming a trilogy that introduces a novel term, the critical discourse analysis of self-radicalization narratives and self-recruitment. To effectively counteract and mitigate the rampant proliferation of extremist ideologies, which employ areas of brainwashing and recruitment in the virtual realm independently, de-radicalization programs need to pivot towards the virtual world. This shift should incorporate advanced technologies such as Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Algorithms to curtail and amplify counter-narratives against violence, particularly within the domains of Ideology and Religion.

Moreover, it is imperative for key stakeholders, including the elite, central and regional governments, police, TNI (Indonesian National Armed Forces), academics, students, parents, and the community, to collaborate in implementing de-radicalization initiatives and promoting counter-narratives against self-radicalization and self-recruitment. This collective effort is essential for fostering a safer digital space and combating the ideological underpinnings that lead to self-radicalization and recruitment within the millennial generation.

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